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A CASE OF BOLETUS POISONING.

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WITHIN the past few years there has been a great increase of general interest in mushrooms, chiefly as articles of food, and probably ten persons now collect and eat them to one that did so ten years ago. The literature treating of fungi, as a food supply, is becoming quite extensive, and much accurate instruction has been given for distinguishing edible from noxious species. But there is naturally a number, it is to be hoped not a large one, of persons whose enthusiasm for their favorite pursuit outruns their knowledge. Not long since the assertion was made by a person of some authority in the mycophagic cult, that "all *Boleti* are edible."¹ Probably RHODORA will reach only a small proportion of the persons who saw this statement; but to some, perhaps, a statement of my experience with the question — not, indeed, whether all *Boleti* are edible, but only whether species described and figured as edible are safe — may be of use.

While there are instances of mycologists losing their lives by eating the wrong mushroom, I think there are not many cases where any person interested in botany has been seriously poisoned in this way, and afterwards published the particulars; so that perhaps some fullness of detail in my case may be not unsuitable.

On Saturday afternoon, September 6, 1890, I found in the Middlesex Fells woods, near the edge of Spot Pond, a colony of *Boleti* in excellent condition, of which I picked and took home quite a quantity. I have never been an enthusiast in mycology, but for several years previous to the time mentioned I had been accustomed to collect and eat such edible forms as I happened to find. I had never made any special study of the subject; I had consulted some of the older English works in the library of the Boston Society of Natural

¹ Asa Gray Bulletin, Vol. VI, p. 15, April, 1898.

History, but depended chiefly on Mr. Julius A. Palmer's *Mushrooms of America*, as especially suited to this region.

The plant collected at this time agreed perfectly with Plate VII, fig. 4, in the last-named work. I had often seen the same plant, but am not sure whether I had eaten it; I certainly had never used it except in small quantities with other species. In this case it constituted the entire collecting; and after being kept over night in a refrigerator, away from anything that could affect it, it was broiled, and served as the "piece of resistance" of the Sunday breakfast. Of the eight at table, three did not eat of it, and experienced nothing unusual; three ate sparingly, and had symptoms similar to those I am about to relate, but milder, and at no time were in any danger; my sister and I ate freely.

After breakfast, at about half past eight, I took a walk in the woods with my two sons, returning about half past ten. Just before reaching home, I felt a sense of oppression and a sort of rising in my stomach, and soon after had an attack of vomiting, followed in about fifteen minutes by another attack, and then others at shortening intervals. I found that my sister, who had remained at home, had been attacked in the same way, but more severely. The doctor had been called by telephone at the beginning of the attack, and had responded promptly, but when he arrived she was in a state of collapse from which the ordinary remedies failed to rouse her; it was necessary for him to use subcutaneous injections of brandy and ether.

By the time he felt safe for her, I was ready for his attentions. I had felt no pain, vertigo, nor headache, and between the attacks I made myself useful, getting brandy from a neighbor and procuring other things needed; but the more and more frequent vomiting, and, after a while, purging, exhausted me. At last I found I could no longer keep on my feet; I looked round to see where that sudden icy wind came from, and at the same instant was conscious of a curious narrowing of the field of vision; it closed up just the same way as an iris diaphragm, leaving a small circular space still available. I was just able to get to bed; suffering no real pain, but cold and helpless. My system was, however, freed from the noxious substance; a good supply of hot, strong coffee warmed me up; I slept quietly, and had no further trouble. It was several days before I recovered my usual strength, and I found myself instinctively walking carefully, almost on tiptoe, as if there were something delicate inside of me that would break if

jarred ; but after a while this passed away. My sister's recovery naturally took longer, but after two or three weeks the last symptoms of sensitiveness disappeared.

Some of the other results, however, lasted longer. For quite a while I received newspaper cuttings announcing that a man in Malden, the name usually something like mine, but seldom exactly the same, who considered himself an expert botanist, had poisoned himself and family by toadstools that he mistook for mushrooms. My friends would say, "Why, Collins, how did you make such a mistake? I thought everybody knew that mushrooms were pink underneath."

I am now willing to eat the field mushroom, the fairy ring, and the puff-ball ; beyond that I do not care to go on my own judgment ; and I doubt if there is any authority that could induce me to eat a *Boletus*, however tempting.

I have given my experience with considerable detail, to illustrate how different the symptoms were from *Amanita* poisoning, and yet how narrow an escape my sister had, if not myself. In neither case was there any vertigo, headache, or acute pain. The symptoms appeared within two hours, and indicated an intense irritant, not a poison, that had affected the system. As soon as the substance was expelled, the difficulty ceased. The danger would seem to be that a delicate constitution would be exhausted before the poison could be expelled.

Within a week after the occurrence, I went again to the locality where the plants grew, and found some still there ; but a week makes much difference with fleshy fungi. I sent the best specimens I could find to Prof. C. H. Peck, who kindly examined them for me. He thought the plant was probably *B. miniato-olivaceus* var. *sensibilis* Peck, the doubt being due to the poor condition of the specimens. The next year I visited the place at the same date, and again sent specimens to Professor Peck ; and he wrote me that there was no longer any doubt of the correctness of the determination first given.

There is reason to suppose that the plate in Palmer's book was drawn from a specimen of *B. miniato-olivaceus* var. *sensibilis* ; the referring it to *B. subtomentosus*, an edible species of Europe, is certainly unfortunate, for this mushroom abounds in the woods in this vicinity ; and medical attendance may not be always as prompt as it was in the case of myself and family.